

**Learning Uncut Episode 67**  
**Helen Blunden – Work, Connect and Learn: A Collaborative Approach**  
**Hosted by Michelle Ockers**



**Michelle Ockers:**

This episode is called ‘Work, Connect and Learn.’ It’s about a collaborative work and learning initiative that was created and delivered over five years ago and was very progressive at the time. It is an approach that is still highly relevant in 2020 as learning professionals seek to support people to connect, work and learn in a digital environment. It also serves as an example of how knowledge sharing can be used to reduce the risk of dependency on a small number of experts or ‘go to’ people in an organisation.

My guest is Helen Blunden, who was the lead designer and facilitator of Work, Connect and Learn. Our conversation is a reunion of sorts in that I actually engaged Helen to work on this project with me when I led a technical academy at Coca-Cola Amatil. Together we tell the story of how we used a guided social learning program to onboard engineers and maintenance teams to a Community of Practice. A key reason that this project was successful was the time taken during the analysis phase to understand the work environment and daily experience of the participants, and to align the outcomes to business goals and use cases. The program was also facilitated using technology and tools that the participants could use as they worked rather than on a learning platform.

You can explore this story further in a collection of blog posts shared in the show notes. Helen and I wrote these posts as we worked out loud on this project. We trust that how we worked and learned together helps you to see the value in walking the talk as a learning professional when it comes to social learning.

**Michelle Ockers:**

Hi, Helen, and welcome to Learning Uncut.

**Helen Blunden:**

Hi, Michelle. Thank you so much for the kind invitation.

**Michelle Ockers:**

It's an absolute pleasure. And what's really nice about today is I get to be both the host and kind of a partial guest as well because this is a story about some work that you and I did together. It's kind of a long time ago now. It's back in late 2014 and early 2015. But I think it's a story that's still really relevant. And if anything, it was ahead of its time in a lot of ways, and it provides a good model for some of the things that people have had to do during COVID to adapt from face to face to more blended and online learning solutions. So I think it's a story whose time has come to tell, Helen.

**Helen Blunden:**

Yes, very much so. I'm excited to share the story, and hopefully it resonates with a lot of people who are going through this COVID time, and they could see some opportunities of what they could do as well.

**Michelle Ockers:**

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I hope so. So let's start with an introduction to you. Let's time travel back to 2014. What were you doing back then? And what are you doing now?

#### Helen Blunden:

Right. Okay, back then, in 2014, I had just left the corporate world, I had left a role with the National Australia Bank as a learning and development consultant, and I had just started my new freelance self-driven business called Activate Learning Solutions. And you were my first client, Michelle.

#### Michelle Ockers:

I didn't know that.

#### Helen Blunden:

Actually, no, you weren't. I'm sorry, you were the very first client with a really big, meaty piece of work. So yeah, that was quite exciting to get involved with that. Five years later, I'm in a different place and yet I'm in the same place, let me explain. I work for a small company called Adopt and Embrace. And we're a Microsoft partner, and we help organizations use and deploy Microsoft 365 tools. And so before COVID started, we're really busy with helping people use Microsoft Teams, and now we're actually exploring and helping them use all the different Microsoft products so they could save time, they could be more productive, they could collaborate better, and they could just use all the tools seamlessly to do their work. And my role specifically is a community manager. So I manage a community of adoption specialists, change managers, people who are in business IT, they usually from change and comms, and they're responsible for helping their organization go through the change management and the adoption of these workplace tools. So I kind of run the community and get them talking to each other and sharing knowledge and sharing their resources so they can help each other out with that.

#### Michelle Ockers:

So for my part, back in 2014, I was with Coca Cola Amatil. I joined in 2012 to set up a technical academy in the supply chain area. And the initial brief I was given with that academy was to build learning pathways off the back of a series of capital investments the company had made in production lines, automated warehouses, SAP software, and they wanted to ensure they realize the benefits in the investment they've made in all these new capabilities.

#### Michelle Ockers:

So we did that, I and my team did that. And then in early 2014, it really struck me that although we'd been using the 70:20:10 framework as an approach, what we've been really doing was designing blended learning programs, which incorporated an element of social learning and workplace learning. But we hadn't been actively and deliberately encouraging continuous learning outside of formal programs. My own education and involvement with a growing network outside of the organization, I realized there was more that we could be doing with continuous workplace learning. So I'd had official endorsement of the business leaders in my area to embrace continuous workplace learning as part of our strategy, and I was kind of looking at how do we align that with our business strategy? And how do we make the shift? What should we be doing?

#### Michelle Ockers:

So what I thought we'd do in this conversation is maybe I'll say it as the person who was indeed the client. But in many ways, we became really, truly collaborators on this work, which is one of the really great things about the story. But I might set the context in terms of

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the business challenge. And then I will switch more into host mode and ask you questions about what happened once you were engaged. Does that sound like a good plan, Helen?

#### Helen Blunden:

Yeah, yeah, let's do it.

#### Michelle Ockers:

Okay. And one of the things I'll mention up front, and, Helen, I was just chatting about how useful this was. We jointly blogged about this whole project. We wrote individual blogs, but they kind of hung together as a story. And I'll put a link in the show notes to a curated collection of the posts that Helen and I both wrote about this body of work, if anyone would like to take a look at that and dig more into any aspect of what we discussed today. But basically, I was at Coca Cola Amatil who, of course, are known as a beverage manufacturer and distributor. They also do some food product. And they hold the regional license for Coca Cola products as well as a range of other beverages. They'd updated the business strategy in early 2014 in supply chain, and there were five key business objectives that were being pursued. And one of them was decrease maintenance downtime. And the objective of that was increasing the production time that was available on the production lines and decreasing maintenance costs. So I had started working on like a portfolio of work to support that objective with the maintenance manager, the National maintenance manager.

#### Michelle Ockers:

So we were partway through a program to build capability for maintenance planners in 2014, when the national engineering manager approached me with a separate issue, but as the story unfolds you see they were related. He was really concerned that, he had one in particular, but a couple of long tenured engineers who were in senior roles in the organization, who had this really deep process knowledge, they had really deep understanding of the production lines across the country as well as in some of the other countries in the region that we held the distributorship for. And he said to me, "Look, can you assign someone from your academy team to shadow the senior engineer, and extract all the stuff he knows and put it into courses and resources for us?"

#### Michelle Ockers:

I had a job to do with stakeholder engagement to get this engineering manager, the national engineering manager from the point of the answer is courses and resources to the answer may be something different. And one of the challenges is, when people have this deep tacit knowledge, it can be really hard to extract that knowledge in a way that can speak to the novice, because it's complex knowledge. But the other aspect is, it's really contextualized. So when someone asks that senior engineer a question, they would be asking in the context of a problem or a challenge or something they needed to do, and putting all of that in a course or resource, there was still interpretation that was going to be required to apply it to a specific situation, it's just the nature of tacit knowledge, right? So I knew there was some risks, if that's what we did, and that may not be efficient.

#### Michelle Ockers:

So I started a discussion with the national engineering manager around how the situation had arisen that we had this gap in knowledge between the more senior long tenured engineers and the more junior engineers that you spoke about, Helen. And it really came down to changes over the decades in how the engineering role was performed. It had been previously, many decades ago, the internal engineers would be doing design of production lines, design and modification to equipment, in some cases, hands on assembly and commissioning of equipment. But over time, that had changed, and the engineers were now

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more like project managers and were outsourcing a lot of that design work. So that deep knowledge that comes with the design and installation of the equipment, they weren't getting that opportunity to learn that through their work. So there was this gap in knowledge there.

#### Michelle Ockers:

So I engaged in a series of conversations with the national engineering manager. It took about six weeks to move from courses and resources to, maybe there's something in a knowledge sharing approach, maybe there's an opportunity here. And the conversations, they even included, I got Harold Jarcho into a conversation. And some of our guests may recall Harold Jarcho from an episode in the Emergent series recently, which I'll link to in the show notes. And he does a lot of work around knowledge management, and particularly collective knowledge and knowledge sharing, and had worked with engineers before. So I thought that would be a good way to build the case with my stakeholder, was to get someone in to talk about a similar situation, and how knowledge sharing approaches could be used. So I managed to get the engineering manager to the point of saying, "Yes, let's take a look at a different kind of approach around knowledge sharing."

#### Michelle Ockers:

So at that point, I thought, well, I need to find someone who knows more about this stuff than I do, because I was still very much on a process of discovery. And what's really interesting, Helen, was, I didn't think of reaching out to anyone other than you. I didn't know you very well. I knew you through Twitter mostly, I think we may have met once at a conference. But I knew your work really well because you're a very active blogger. So I knew how, like I had a good sense for how you might approach the work. I knew what sort of work you've done in the past. And I felt like I was in really safe hands. So the benefits of blogging.

#### Helen Blunden:

Yeah, very much so. It's basically, so what I'm hearing you say, because I was working out loud, you had the confidence in being able to approach me, and what I loved about this piece of work and how we both kind of took a risk in this that we blogged and we worked out loud through this process. Now, a lot of organizations, a lot of client-vendor relationships would probably not do something like this. But we basically worked out loud through the process, and now to this day, five years later, I'm still using the key lessons learned from this project, and the blogs that we used, and the different lessons that we learned from this in today's project. So thank you for kind of working out loud through this process, because it's been great. And I would highly recommend it for anyone else, any organization. If you can, if you're not sharing sensitive or private information, obviously, then it's a great opportunity to kind of share your knowledge and share your experiences in how you're doing a particular project, and you never know who you might meet online.

#### Michelle Ockers:

That's true. I think there was a sense of integrity as well. And I was very conscious of needing to role model the approaches we were trying to encourage, and we were exploring with this group of people in the engineering and maintenance at Coca Cola Amatil.

#### Helen Blunden:

The role modelling that you mentioned is so important, even now, nowadays. Now that post COVID where a lot of organizations are using these tools already for asynchronous learning, I think they're kind of cutting onto the fact that they need to be role modelling this, if they are encouraging their people to use the tools to connect with each other, to work, and learn, and collaborate with each other, they themselves need to be using the same tools. So yeah, I think the Coca Cola work learning connect program was pretty much, I guess, the

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basis of understanding how we work today. But we happen to go through it five years before, and we were just learning on the, we were both learning on the go as to the new behaviours of modern workplace learning.

#### Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. And we didn't know at the start, when we started the analysis phase, what the solution was going to look like, or what the appetite was going to look like, what might be viable. So Helen, maybe a good point to move into more detail. And this is to talk about the analysis phase of the project. What was the objective, and how was the analysis phase done?

#### Helen Blunden:

Yeah. The analysis phase was the... I guess it was the most important bit because it kind of challenged our assumptions. So we didn't want to actually set up a solution straightaway, we needed to go and speak to the engineers, we needed to go and see the different sites. So the analysis phase involved me and some elements, we both went out together to the Western Australian site. I can't remember the name.

#### Michelle Ockers:

Kewdale.

#### Helen Blunden:

Kewdale, that's it. And actually speaking to the people on the floors out there doing the work, and asking them questions about how do they do their work? What kind of tools and systems do they have in place? Who do they ask if they have a question or an issue or a problem or a concern, who do they go to? What are the tools that they currently use? What are the sites, the websites that they use, how are they connecting with each other? So the analysis involved a whole heap of, I guess, exploring and asking a lot of questions about what is their level of connection to their team, their level of connection to their site, and also the level of connection to their interest sites. So how are they also talking to other Coca Cola Amatil sites to solve problems together?

#### Helen Blunden:

And that was really interesting, because the results indicated that, yes, they were collaborating, but it was all at a site level. So it wasn't intra-site, so they weren't actually knowledge sharing across sites. So if one particular site had an issue with a machine, they didn't know what happened with regards to how they rectified that solution, who they got involved, what did they do? So other sites weren't aware of it, they didn't have any line of sight over it.

#### Michelle Ockers:

So we did, I think, six production sites in Australia at the time, one in New Zealand, and they were within scope of this initial piece of work. But we also had production sites in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and Fiji. And because of that investment program I talked about previously, there was a type of production line called a blow fill line, and I won't go into detail on what that is, but a blow fill line which was common now, they had common equipment across all of the sites, including in Indonesia, I don't think that had been in Papua New Guinea and Fiji, maybe Papua New Guinea. But they also had some legacy equipment. But there was at least a core of common equipment at each site. But you're right, Helen, we found that there are networks, with the exception of maybe one or two people at each site who did have relationships with people at other sites because they had been on a training



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course together at one point in time, or they'd had some sort of contact. Most people were only connected and communicating with people who worked at their own site.

#### Michelle Ockers:

So you had this choke point of the senior engineering manager at national level who handled a lot of queries. And then in each site, you had, again, these little choke points of certain people, one or two people at the site who were better networked or more experienced, so they would get all the queries. And occasionally they might reach out to someone at another site. But often they were just kind of in these little pools, local pools trying to figure things out themselves or making improvements and getting better, improving equipment efficiency and so on, but not necessarily connecting to the other sites. I think the distinction was the maintenance planners. So there's two types of roles here, one is the maintenance planners, who are basically desk jobs. They're planning all the scheduled maintenance in particular. And then you had the guys that we were following around on the shop floor who were the guys on the tools, who were going and fixing equipment or doing the planned maintenance. So while the maintenance planners were better connected, the guys on the shop floor weren't all that well connected.

#### Helen Blunden:

And it was so interesting to ask these questions and really understand how they do their work. And I would say, it is so important to just get out there, go speak to people, understand what it is they do, understand their work, understand the tools and the systems that they use, understand the restrictions and the constraints in the environment. Understand who are the people that they go to? And who are the most networked ones? And understanding that, then you kind of get a gist of what is really happening and where you can then focus your attention with regards to coming up with a potential solution.

#### Michelle Ockers:

So coming out of the analysis phase, there were a couple of key artefacts you created to communicate the potential opportunity here, back in business language back to the national engineering manager. So one of those was a list of business use cases. And you also created, I remember this color-coded map, which showed the different ways, a visual map which showed the different ways people were, we were capturing and sharing knowledge. And it really highlighted that we were quite good at documenting things at a local level, but we were not good at creating the more fluid knowledge sharing around tacit knowledge around the discovery processes and improvements people were working on.

#### Helen Blunden:

And I think we needed that map. And we needed to see where that main communication was happening, and what were the tools that they were using, and the color-coding, I think, worked well, because then you could focus in on development around those areas.

#### Michelle Ockers:

I'll put a specific link in the show notes to your blog post which had that color-coded map. But in terms of use cases and the way we frame success metrics for this piece work, we didn't frame them as learning activities, or even knowledge and skills. We framed them more as business outcomes. Can you remember some of the success metrics that were proposed?

#### Helen Blunden:

Yeah. And I think this is also something that came out of my background as a performance consultant of needing to identify where the use cases are. It's not about learning, it's about

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the work that people are doing, because that's what they understand. And so the use cases came out, obviously, the use cases have to relate back to the business strategy. And we had those, but the user cases then we identified what was a problem that was happening in Coca Cola. So that was a use case, and I'm trying to recall now, it was around, that was ultimately picked out by the team. So they came up with it. They were the ones saying...

#### Michelle Ockers:

Things like troubleshooting. Troubleshooting problems on equipment that they were having difficulty figuring out what to do about sometimes, that was an example of a use case. Process improvements and sharing process improvements was another use case.

#### Helen Blunden:

Yeah. So it was important that they came up with their use cases, not us coming in and saying, "Hey, it's X, Y, Z."

#### Michelle Ockers:

So that was another thing we asked about on the site visits, right? Around, what are you curious about at other sites? How might it improve your work if you had better visibility of what was being done at other sites by people in roles just like you? And we just found there was, I remember there was this real desire, this real curiosity and a willingness to share what they were learning with other sites, but I didn't know how to do it, like where's all of this information to make it visible to others? How about sharing? Do I even have the time to do it? How do I fit this into my working day? Particularly given I spend a lot of time on the floor, and I might have a mobile device in my pocket, but I've got no idea how to get to anything from my mobile. So there were some of the issues, the real challenges that were coming up, it wasn't that people weren't willing. It was just the mechanics of how do I do this?

#### Helen Blunden:

That's right. And we teased those out. So they came up with the use cases, and then going back to just your previous question around, then we've got the use cases, what are the success metrics? How do we measure whether they have met those particular outcomes? And I've just got the slide up here. So some of the things as examples was, we wanted to see an increase in collaboration, document collaboration, and that could be sharing of stories, sharing of different tips, sharing of experiences, we had a hashtag, remember, this #SupplyChainWin. So if they shared a story where they have achieved something or something was successful, have the hash tag so then you could filter the hash tag and capture the stories, and actually then equate those stories to some kind of dollar value, time saved, or whatever it was. So other things was, if we saw an increase in partnering between the business units and between the sites, and that could easily be identified by the union with the people were, if they were cross-collaborating in different sites-

#### Michelle Ockers:

Process improvements.

#### Helen Blunden:

We had process improvements, that's right.

#### Michelle Ockers:

Which is a hard metric.

#### Helen Blunden:

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Yeah. So there was a whole heap of them. And out of that then as well, remember how we had to measure it, it was before, during, and after, we were constantly evaluating these things. So everyone who was going through the program had that same evaluation, that survey or those same questions, and then we could track it, how we were progressing. And then, that way then, at the end of the program, you had a story to also share to your stakeholders with actual data, with actual success stories, with actual examples of how much money was saved, how much time was saved. So yeah, and I think that was really important. I think having that story captured throughout the process also made what we were doing meaningful to stakeholders.

#### Michelle Ockers:

And we were able to define an evaluation process right up front, rather than trying to figure it out at the end. And I recall we used the Etienne-Wenger value creation model. I'll put a post to a resource on that in show notes. Because often people say, "Well, how do you measure social learning? How do you measure collaborative learning?" And there's this really nice value creation cycle from informal and social learning and collaboration, which you can actually use to define an evaluation strategy, which was what we did in this phase. So coming out of the analysis, one of the recommendations was, we should set up a community of practice. And there was another recommendation, Helen, around how we launch the community of practice, and engage people in the community of practice through what we call the Work, Connect and Learn program. Because it's not a case of build it and they will come, particularly because I've got no idea of why would I do this, and how do I even access and use the tools and so on. So do you want to talk about Work, Connect and Learn and who it was for, and what the objectives were?

#### Helen Blunden:

Okay. And I have to just say here, just before we designed that Work, Connect and Learn program, the analysis also identified the kind of tools that the people were using. And for me, my approach is, I don't usually go out and seek out and buy new tools, I actually prefer to look at the tools that people are currently using in their workplace, see what they have access to, and then see whether we could create this community using the tools that they already have. And so that community of practice, once I got into, you gave me the access to the SharePoint site, and back then it was SharePoint 2013. And so 2013 had a feed, there were discussion forums as well. So already, it showed us that Coca Cola already had the technology to have this stuff. So it was up to us now to kind of design a system around the tools that you guys already had. And the whole idea was creating, I guess, a blended learning program over a period of, I think it was five or six weeks. It was five modules, and each module was meant to step a person through helping them build a network and helping them interact and engage in a community of practice.

#### Helen Blunden:

But the very first module, we called it module zero, was helping them understand what are the tools I already have and have to set themselves up. So we couldn't exactly push them into a community, an online community and say, "Hey, there you go, start interacting, start sharing what you know in there." We actually had to slowly build them up to that point. So yeah, module zero was the very first module.

#### Michelle Ockers:

I think we called it module zero because we wanted them to know it wasn't about the tools, it was about the behaviours that they needed to be... It was like a prerequisite module almost. And they had to know how to use the tools to actually start practicing the behaviours.

#### Helen Blunden:



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That's right. So yes, the first module. Now, when you think of module, people go, "Oh yeah, it's a course." But if you think about it, it was a module that had a webinar that was run twice in a week. But there were pre-webinar and post-webinar activities that they had to complete before each webinar. And there was sets of curated resources for more information. So it was kind of like a building block where every week, they ran through the whole program as a cohort. But the first module was all about learning what they have available, learning the tools, getting themselves set up. And then module one was learning how to connect, module two was learning how to network, module three was learning how to collaborate using the tools, and then out of module three, they had to come up with a problem that they had to work on and solve. And in module four, was all about how do they use those tools and collaborate in their community solving that user case, that problem that they had within their business? And so yes, it went through, what? I think it was about five or six weeks over it. But it wasn't just, hey, bang, do a webinar and then that is it. No. There was actual structured activities and resources that they could use using SharePoint Online as the format in which they did that in. And also using Lync.

#### Michelle Ockers:

So there was a learning management system in sight, was there-

#### Helen Blunden:

No learning management system.

#### Michelle Ockers:

... in their working.

#### Helen Blunden:

In SharePoint, that's right, in SharePoint.

#### Michelle Ockers:

We didn't take attendance, we didn't take records because that wasn't the point. It was all about what they did back on the job. And that's what we were more interested in.

#### Helen Blunden:

Yeah. Also, the opportunity there is once you help people understand how to use these tools and start sharing their knowledge because remember, they wanted to share it, ultimately then, they are communicating in a forum, and they're sharing some interesting stuff about their work problems, ideas that actually drive the engagement, that drive people to get back in there to say, "Okay, what has this person done at this site? Hey, I've got a question X, Y, Z has broken down, what do I do?" So you're continually driving people to the site. The other thing we did, which is really important, because people constantly ask me this question, do we keep the communities private or public? And remember how we kept it? We kept it public because we wanted people to just drop in, you never know who would drop in and ask a question, or solve a question.

#### Michelle Ockers:

Do you remember someone from Papua New Guinea drop in?

#### Helen Blunden:

Yes, yeah, they dropped in.

#### Michelle Ockers:



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They weren't part of the target group, but they saw some activity on SharePoint and they joined in some of the conversation, which was great. And I had, when the business upgraded to SharePoint 2013, so they had been using 2010, and I was aware they were upgrading to 2013. And I had a look online at the features and functionality, and I saw that it was a whole stack of new social functionality being rolled out. So I volunteered, I went to IT and said, "Do you want someone to help you with the change management in my business unit?" And of course, they weren't going to say no, they said yes. So by default, and people sort of looked at it and asked me, "Why are you volunteering to do that?" And I said to them, "Because I think there is an incredible opportunity here to use this for collaborative learning. But I'm concerned that the way it's set up, and the way it's managed at the moment, all people are going to want to do is put documents on it."

#### Michelle Ockers:

So I actually volunteered to take on that extra responsibility. And I ended up inheriting governance of SharePoint for the business unit. And one of the things I had done, which had made, and this is all relevant to the point you raise about keeping everything public. There were two key things I did, one of which was easier than the other. And one of those was to get the new site settings changed by default to public rather than private, because previously, every site being set up as private, and you had to make a case for making it public. So I said, no, the default should be public. And if people think it should be private, they need to make a case for making it private, because that goes completely counter to the benefits we're trying to realize here by using collaborative tools.

#### Michelle Ockers:

The other thing was, and this took a lot of effort, when SharePoint had originally been rolled out in 2010 or 2011, basically, every team had gotten their own site. So the infrastructure, our online infrastructure completely replicated our siloed distributed physical infrastructure. So for instance, in maintenance, we had six maintenance team sites in Australia, all of which were private. So there was no visibility, no discoverability between the sites. So I had to work really hard, and it took me months and months of change management to actually shift to, for instance, we made one maintenance site for the whole of Australia on SharePoint. And it was only by doing that that we laid the foundations to be able to use SharePoint for a community of practice right across the country

#### Michelle Ockers:

And the other thing about tools is, we ran the webinars using Skype for Business, it might have even been Lync at the time, and then we changed to Skype for business. And both you and I had to do a lot of learning both about SharePoint and about how on earth do we run webinars using this tool? And we were wanting to do things that even the IT department in Coca Cola Amatil hadn't figured out, and I think you actually went out into your external network to ask people, how do we do some of these things.

#### Helen Blunden:

Yeah. I had to kind of upskill myself on Lync which was the pre, not pre, prior Skype for Business. But then, once I got on Lync and actually dabbled in it, I thought, "Okay, this is easy. We can screen share, we could show PowerPoint slides." So it was really just a delivery mechanism. It was kind of like the early days of webinar. And so that wasn't the issue at all, it was the fact that we just had to explore what tools were currently available. And I do remember when we ran our very first session, someone mentioned the webinar, I go, "Oh my God, we can see you, Helen." And I said, "Yeah, I'm at home, and I happen to be," like the Coca Cola Moorabbin factory is literally five minutes down the road. And I remember one of the guys at the webinar said, "Have we got this?" And I said, "Yeah, this is

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Link, you've got the tools already available, you can actually connect with each other and talk to other sites." And he couldn't believe it, he goes, "Why didn't anyone tell us this?"

#### Michelle Ockers:

That's right. And that is part of the point. We were trying to use the tools that they had available to them that they could use. The other thing we did was we figured out how to use the mobile app for SharePoint and also for Lync, and we showed people how to do that, so that, if they're on the shop floor and they wanted to have a conversation with someone, or they wanted to physically be able to show someone, and this was in the days before FaceTime was a thing, right? Wanted to physically show them what was happening with a piece of equipment and consult with someone at another site, that they had the tools in their pocket to be able to do that, that they didn't need to be at a computer. So at the time, this was all pretty cutting edge inside the company.

#### Helen Blunden:

Very much, yeah, very much so. But Michelle, to be fair, that a lot of organizations now are still going through the same thing. They still require people to show them how to use the tools, how to use the apps, how they use them in the context of their work. So it's still very relevant to today.

#### Michelle Ockers:

But you know, I had this moment, Helen, and I'll always remember this, and it was like, it came with a bit of an embarrassment at the time, I've got to say, you and I were working together, and I was getting quite frustrated with, "Well, I don't know if SharePoint does this or that. I'll go and ask IT." And you said to me, "No, look here, let's just go to the network and ask, or let's just do an experiment, let's just play with it." And I thought, wow, it was like this moment of a-ha for me. I'm just like everyone else waiting for IT to tell me and expecting IT will have all the answers instead of just trying things out. So I learned a really valuable lesson from you in that, and that you just have to make the time to give things a go and to do your own research. And everyone was waiting for IT to tell them rather than having a go with using the tools for themselves to see how they could improve their work.

#### Helen Blunden:

Yeah, yeah. Oh, well, thank you for that, it was really interesting to dabble and experiment in there. Because it was kind of like, as soon as you dabbled in it, you realize what you had available, what was available to you, and then you could structure your solution around how the technology works for that. And so yeah, there was a level of upskill for me to learn SharePoint 2013. But so what? We we're doing it again in our current work, we're constantly learning these tools. So yes, it's just part of the process of understanding what we've got and then structuring the solution to be around how they could be used.

#### Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. So let's go back to the design of the modules and how they ran. I just wanted to point out that the post webinar activities every week were actually workplace activities, not learning activities. We were getting them to go and do things. So I think the first week was all about setting up their profiles on SharePoint so that people could see their experience, so that they could discover each other's, so they could, I think we asked them to go and find and connect with people in the same job role as them at other sites. So to start building their network as an example.

#### Helen Blunden:

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That's right, yeah. So the post activities were related to the work and what they had learned during the webinar, the pre-webinar activities were just kind of like introductions, just to get them into the mindset of what they're going to expect in the webinar. So it was really important to have activities that were relevant, that were contextual, that also set them up for success with regards to having an online presence. So making sure that they had a profile up to date, that when they got online, it was as though I was speaking to that person, if that makes sense. So having an online profile, effectively, because you're interacting in an online community, your online presence is pretty much your face to others, if that makes sense. So sharing about the importance of having a fully filled out online profile, having a photo in there, things that, to some people, would be so basic, but our people they might not realize, "Oh, okay, I really need to have this online presence so that people can trust me."

#### Michelle Ockers:

But people weren't even aware that when you search at the time, I'm not sure exactly what the situation is now, not being in SharePoint actively at the moment. That when you search for a term at the time, it would look through people's profiles as well and bring back people who had that term in their profile. So you discover people, it wasn't just documents that you discover, and I think this was a bit of a revelation, and the idea of using hashtags, and how hash tagging a conversation improved discoverability. So I think that was one of the key concepts we tried to build in. So openness was one of them and discoverability and how you can enhance being discoverable yourself and being able to find others and other conversations. It's much like the way we might use LinkedIn, right?

#### Helen Blunden:

That's right. Yeah. And I think five years ago, I think it was still all quite new to people. But I must admit, every time we did mention something like a good idea, or a tip that they could use SharePoint in some way, whether it's filtering on keywords, or filtering on hashtags, or whatever it was, and the penny dropped, it made things easier for us with regards to, once the penny dropped for people, the motivation and then the openness to learning this stuff came a lot easier. It's kind of like, there wasn't the barrier or the obstacle with people not wanting to learn or not wanting to do the work. It was, when people are commenting and saying, "Oh my God, we didn't know how to do this, oh my God, can people see my profile? Oh my God, I can actually do a search and try and find someone who's an expert in this." Sometimes it does require people to show them the way for them to realize that they've got a very powerful tool at their hands, but no one has helped them understand how to use it for the purposes of their work.

#### Michelle Ockers:

Just thinking about like the rhythm of the program as we went through it, and the rhythm of the community starting to grow. I think there was this critical turning point in week four, where I think the question you'd seeded was, for people to go and share, was it the top five maintenance issues at their site?

#### Helen Blunden:

That's right. Yeah, it was right at the last week. Now, recall that we mentioned that it was, this was an entire building block. But the last module was all about application and context. So now we wanted to have them share some kind of problem that they were having so that they could share that problem and then identify some solutions. And so yeah, the last module was all about, what are your top three pain points. And that was then interesting to have people share those pain points in the discussion forum, and then kind of sit back. Like, as for the online facilitators, I wasn't there to kind of prod or impede the conversation, I was there to basically look at how people were actually having those conversations. And

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sometimes though, it did involve, I think you also encourage people behind the scenes to respond to certain...

#### Michelle Ockers:

There was definitely some nudging needed.

#### Helen Blunden:

There was nudging, yeah.

#### Michelle Ockers:

To say to people, "Did you see this problem you just posted about, this other person also posted about that same problem, you might want to have a conversation with." So helping people to connect the dots. The other thing was manager encouragement. And a lot of what I did behind the scenes was letting managers know when someone in their team had shared something, had helped someone else solve a problem. And just saying, you might want to comment online on that, or you might want to just have a quick word, then when you're doing your next round on the shop floor to let them know that you saw that and encourage that behaviour is kind of like the tap on the shoulder. If the managers let them know that it was okay, then they were more likely to do it again. And I guess that's part of community management, right? Some of the background stuff that you do to help build interaction and sustain the community.

#### Helen Blunden:

That's right. And if it comes from the manager, even better, because then, yeah, you got the confirmation that it's all good, it's okay to do this.

#### Michelle Ockers:

Now, I don't know, I'm just thinking about the patterns of interaction, because of course, in an online community, not everyone is equally active. So I think we had about 140 participants, and there were certainly a smaller number than that who were really active. But two that surprised me were two of the older guys who've been around a lot longer, and one of them had, when I'd had discussions with him about doing things online, he'd been really sceptical. He was the maintenance manager at Northmead site. Now, he and the maintenance manager from Auckland both became very active, and were getting their teams to share things that they were discovering, they were sharing updates to processes, they really led the charge, to my mind.

#### Helen Blunden:

Fantastic. And they're the type of people who then you get inspired from. And I'm glad that it was senior engineering managers, because then other engineering managers would see, these are other engineers. And they themselves are the role models for others. So that's really good that they got involved there.

#### Michelle Ockers:

Yeah. And I think the maintenance planners were the other group who were super active, and they're sitting at a desk, so it's a little bit easier for them, and they're grappling with similar challenges in terms of the scheduling of maintenance and so on. So they were very active. The other things, sometimes the activity was around, both during the program and then subsequently as the community continued. Sometimes it was activity driven, so specific types of activity, the use cases. And when people had to do a root cause analysis, so a root cause analysis was done when there was a problem that was really hard to solve, an equipment problem, maybe it was something that was recurring, or something that they just



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couldn't figure out after a few days how to resolve a problem with a piece of machinery, the local team would do a root cause analysis. And we actually set up a page where people could share their root cause analyses and post them in the website or invite people to comment when they were getting ready to do a root cause analysis. And that was one of our more successful use cases, I think.

#### Helen Blunden:

Yeah. I mean, it's so important, like looking at this program. The modules themselves were kind of like more of meat, so that was the program. But what we were doing here was helping build a community. So the timeline was going to be a lot longer. So we didn't go into it thinking like an instructional designer, it was all just a bit basic or do a course and then that's it. To build a community means it's going to take a long time for people to build the trust to share their work. It's not something that you just kind of put in and then the next day, bang, it's gone. So the program itself, building a community did take time. But it was so important to be driven by the people, and so, that's why it was really positive to see the engineers in there sharing knowledge, sharing their ideas, sharing their business processes, yeah, sharing their root cause analysis.

#### Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, absolutely. So let's talk about challenges and what we might do differently, or what indeed either of us has done differently. So do you recall what some of the key challenges were?

#### Helen Blunden:

You might have to remind me, because I found the whole project itself, the key challenges for me was understanding the tools that Coca Cola had. And so just from my point of view, it was understanding what was available, and then it wasn't as such pulling the activities together, or the program itself, that I found quite okay. But there was a bit of give and take for us to kind of come up with that. I think, I don't know, if I was to do something differently... Believe it or not, this is still very relevant today. If anything, I would still use the same approach, which is the analysis first, identification of user cases, stakeholder engagement, and also coming up with measurable success metrics that are related to the user cases. The tools themselves I would change, but that's by the by, it's five years later.

#### Michelle Ockers:

Yeah, absolutely. There was one decision that we ummed and ahed about, which when we created, and when I say we, Coca-Cola Amatil went on using this as a proof of concept to set up several other communities of practice, and continued to use and to reshape the Work, Connect and Learn program. There was one decision we made which we did differently for subsequent community launches. We were asked by the national engineering manager about the strategy of launching the community with everyone, managers right down to shop floor all at once, and the recommendation was, let's launch with everyone, because we want it to be fully inclusive. In retrospect, and what we did with subsequent communities was, we decided to launch with a smaller champion group first, sub-communities. So for instance, in the manufacturing area, when we launched the community in manufacturing, we started with our SAP system super users first, because we wanted to create change agents who then could carry them to build the community and build the interaction and get people from their sites on board, which turned out to be a good model. Because we were trying to do the change management with the managers at the same time as everyone else. So I might approach it in two waves in future, but it still worked very well.

#### Helen Blunden:

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Yeah. And it's so important change agents to have involved. Okay. Yeah, that's really good. That's a good point.

#### Michelle Ockers:

And the other thing which we did subsequently. So one of the pieces of feedback we got in the evaluation was around resources for continued support, and being able to access resources. People just kind of forgot how to do certain things, and use the tools, and so on. So we eventually in Coca-Cola Amatil created a self-paced version of the Work, Connect and Learn program, where people could join at any time independently. And we had notifications set up on discussion boards. So when they did activities, we knew they were in the program because we got a notification that someone had done something on an activity board. So we could track it that way. But we broke the content down into short resources that became performance resources as well, and people could access any of it in any sequence they wanted. And we were able to keep an eye on what people were accessing and what they were finding useful. So that certainly helped. So in terms of the things that you thought went particularly well, and why they went particularly well, what would you call out as maybe just a couple of highlights?

#### Helen Blunden:

I think, first and foremost, us taking a position of, I guess, the role modelling aspect that you mentioned, and working out loud through the process. The working out loud helped us structure our thinking, also kind of cement some of the things that we were doing and thinking about and our approach. So I would say that was a highlight and also a strength. It certainly helped me because it allowed me to reflect on my approach and how I would do things. So that's valuable. The second thing I would say, the analysis phase, it was so important. It was critical. Yeah, we could just not do something just, we had to get out, speak to people, look at the tools and experimenting with the tools that we had available. So I think those two would stay in top of mind for me. The pulling together and creating the program for me, I wasn't too fussed about that simply because I had it in my head as to how it needed to happen. But I wanted it, it had to be business, like there had to be some kind of business context to use cases.

#### Michelle Ockers:

I think that is the same thing that made this successful, it was grounded right from the start in business context, because it was built around business use cases, using business tools, and asking people to do business activities right from the start.

#### Helen Blunden:

And the last point I would make is, I came away learning something, this is my measure of success, if I come away feeling as if I have learned something new, and actually have created something different, something bespoke, and something that people are using, and the feedback that we're getting back is people are surprised, but it's a nice surprise that they're using this and they're connecting. That's a positive, that's my key, I guess, driver that I'm on the right track. So yeah.

#### Michelle Ockers:

The other success from my perspective internally was the national engineering manager became a true champion at a senior level, who then influenced other senior managers to embrace this kind of approach. So it was really critical creating that social proof and influence and was really the point of kind of take-off of this kind of approach to learning at Coca Cola Amatil. And I will tell you, they now have Workplace.

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#### Helen Blunden:

Are they doing?

#### Michelle Ockers:

They do, yes. So it's a whole lot easier to use. It's a whole lot more natural because people know the behaviours from using Facebook outside of work. So we laid the seeds back then for a lot of the embracing that's going on now inside the organization. And I still talk to some of the people in the organization, and they tell me about the things they're still doing as a result of the work that we did five or six years ago, and the seeds that laid for behaviour change. So these things do take time, but it is well worth it. And of course, it would be remiss of me not to mention that the adaptation of the program to another community, and continuing use of the Work, Connect and Learn program was recognized as a highly commended finalists for social and collaborative learning the first time the AITD, the Australian Institute of Training and Development, ever offered that award back in 2015, or actually 2016, I think. So that was a hallmark of external recognition of the quality of the work and the impact of the work. So thank you for your help on that.

#### Helen Blunden:

No, thank you for seeing the vision. And I think, because it was five years ago, it was very new to many people. I don't know whether at this point now, five years later, whether it would be new, but I am kind of like, I am 80 to 90% sure that still the behaviours and the challenges that people are having nowadays, with the current tools and around collaboration around teamwork around knowledge sharing, it's still happening. So I think what we did with this program was, I guess, far reaching, I still use it, I still apply the learnings, yeah, I still see that there's a real need for it. So thank you, Michelle, for having the vision as well and getting me on board to actually make it happen.

#### Michelle Ockers:

So what would be your key takeaway tip for anyone who's keen to do more with supporting collaboration?

#### Helen Blunden:

I would just say be open to it. And knowing that, the very first thing I would say is, you're going to have this support, collaboration, but you're going to go through a journey of this yourself. So you're going to go through your own personal learning journey of being open, so role modelling and learning. So if you want to support open collaboration, be prepared to also change something about yourself. So you're going to have to look at how you also collaborate with others in your team, across your organization, or across your networks. And be prepared for having some, I guess, some mind-blowing moments where you think and question why it is you do the things and the way that you do them. And if you are prepared to make those changes, be open to learning, be open to collaborating, be open to using these tools, even though you feel overwhelmed and swamped, and don't understand how to use them. And also, you're not afraid of going out and speaking to people who are outside of L&D who are in the business, who are out in the industry, and actually just soaking up and being curious about everything, then you'll be good, you'll be alright.

#### Michelle Ockers:

Absolutely. I think this is clearly one of those cases where, if learning and development professionals are going to support others to engage in collaboration and to learn from each other, they really need to dive in and have the experience themselves to figure out how to support others as well as being great role models. I think that's excellent advice. So Helen, one final question. And I know this is kind of an extended podcast episode, we've gone a

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little bit over what I normally aim for, but I think it's been worth it. In what ways does the work you're doing at Adopt and Embrace similar or different from the body of work we've just described?

#### Helen Blunden:

Yeah, it's actually very similar. Five years ago, I found it difficult to try and explain the value of social and collaborative learning to a lot of organizations simply because the social tools weren't there available within the workplace, or our own workplace tools five years ago didn't allow for that collaboration to happen. So currently, now in my work, it's very, very similar, even though I'm not in a typical L&D role, I'm managing a community, so I'm still using community tools, collaborative tools and helping people interact and engage and participate in online communities. But as well as that, as a company, I work for Adopt and Embrace, like I mentioned earlier on. We also used to run facilitator-led workshops. And so we had to go through the process of changing our face-to-face workshops into blended learning programs, much like the Work, Learn and Connect. And I was involved also for helping out my peers, my colleagues, look at how they could change the design of their facilitator-led programs and make them more blended using now all the Microsoft products. So yeah, doing very similar things. It's just that now I find it easier to explain what it is I do and how we do it with companies.

#### Michelle Ockers:

I think there's something in the language too around, there's much greater awareness around collaborative work rather than collaborative learning. So we talk about the fact that we're supporting and enabling people to work collaboratively and just stop talking about it being learning collaboratively, and we're doing it by integrating their learning with their work, if that makes sense. I think it brings together some shifts that we've been seeing in Learning and Development. So Helen, thank you so much for your time today and for joining me to help to tell the story around the Work, Connect and Learn program. There'll be a link to Helen's LinkedIn profile in the episode show notes for anyone who would like to reach out and explore some of the things we've talked about further. We'll include a link to the Adopt and Embrace website as well so people can go directly there. You don't need to become a salesperson for Adopt and Embrace, Helen, although you're an awesome ambassador. So thank you so much.

#### Michelle Ockers:

And for our listeners, if you are finding Learning Uncut valuable, please take a moment to rate the podcast, it helps get it into more listening ears and get the guest stories out there. This is the last of our case study episodes for 2020. The next episode is a year in review episode. We will be continuing our fortnightly episodes, but they'll be a little bit different over the Christmas and what is in Australia the summer holiday period, so stay tuned for more. Thanks again, Helen.

#### Helen Blunden:

Thank you so much, Michelle.

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## Learning Uncut Episode 67 Helen Blunden – Work, Connect and Learn: A Collaborative Approach



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### About Michelle Ockers

*Michelle Ockers works with business and learning leaders to realise the untapped potential of learning in organisations. She is an organisational learning strategist and modern workplace learning practitioner. Michelle works with organisations to develop and implement transformative organisational learning strategy, and to build the capability of their learning team. She delivers keynotes, workshops and webinars for learning and broader professional or workforce groups at both public and in-house events. Michelle also mentors learning professionals at all career stages on career planning and professional development.*

*Michelle received the following prestigious industry awards in 2019:*

- *Australian Institute of Training and Development Dr Alastair Rylatt Award for L&D Professional of the Year – for outstanding contribution to the practice of learning and development*
- *Internet Time Alliance Jay Cross Memorial Award – for outstanding contribution to the field of informal learning*

*Michelle can be contacted at [michelle@michelleockers.com](mailto:michelle@michelleockers.com).*



[www.michelleockers.com](http://www.michelleockers.com)